

Power of Remembrance

Nehemiah 9



Week Twelve

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Nehemiah 9

BOOKENDS

If you have been following the chiasmic structure of Nehemiah, we have come to the end. (You're thinking, "Wait, there are more chapters!" We'll come to those next week.) As the first chapter revealed the future course of Nehemiah's ministry through prayer, Nehemiah 9, the corresponding bookend chapter, reflects on the past course of God's people also through prayer. Whereas the first prayer was by Nehemiah alone on behalf of the larger community, this prayer is about the whole nation of which Nehemiah is merely a part.

Though the two prayers are different in trajectory and in breadth, they both retain the elements of adoration, confession, promises, and vision (see week 1). Fasting is mentioned in both chapters, alluding to the sincerity of seeking God's will. Both incorporate the Word of God: in chapter 1, Nehemiah claims promises he knows, while in chapter 9, they "read from the book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day" (verse 3, NKJV).

Both prayers reveal the importance of studying how God's hand has led in history. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord had led us, and His teaching in our past history" (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, 162).



inScribe

Write out Nehemiah 9:26–38 from the translation of your choice.

If you're pressed for time, write out Nehemiah 9:30–35. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline it, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/ phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/ phrases to other associated or related words/phrases



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

Have you recently recounted God's work in your personal life? In your family? In your church?



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THE PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

The prayer starts with adoration, praising the name of God (Nehemiah 9:1). Then it continues to go through the history of the Israelites. Genesis and the Creation account is found in verse 6. The founding father of the covenant, Abraham, is then alluded to in verses 7 and 8. Then we transition to the book of Exodus where Moses and the commandments are mentioned in verses 9–17. The wilderness experiences are then waded through from verse 18 to verse 21; the conquest of Canaan is described in verses 22–25; and so on.

At first glance, one may want to skip over this chapter, thinking it to be a synopsis of the entire Old Testament. In some ways, it is; but there is a deeper exercise going on here. A theology of salvation history is being developed within the prayer.

Memory is a powerful tool. It molds who we are more than we may realize. Though we may not think of past memories intentionally on a daily basis, they comprise our subconscious operating system, affecting how we interact with people, our emotional tenor in various situations, what habits we naturally develop, and what behaviors we abhor in others as well as ourselves. These memories, whether they be good or bad, are often tucked away in the deep recesses of our hearts. Accessing these memories has a way of vivifying and strengthening our identities, values, and even spiritual capacities for faith, hope, and love.

Whereas this can take place on a personal level, as it happened to Nehemiah in chapter 1, there is an even more profound experience when done collectively on the community level. As much as God works in the lives of individuals, He works in the lives of communities as well. Especially in the trajectory of the Israelites, the prayer establishes that He made all things good, He called Abraham out of His goodness, He called a people out of slavery, protected them, gave them good things, and so on. The overwhelming theme that emerges is that God is good.

Upon this basis that God is good, the Jews can now go forward in faith that God continues to be good. It is in the exercise of reflection that deep insights and profound revelations on self and God can occur. This benefits us not only in past contemplation or present satisfaction but, most importantly, in future assurance and confidence of faith.

THE POWER OF FORGETTING

Try reading Nehemiah 9 a couple of times through. Just as driving into a community for the first time seems unfamiliar and distant, the more times we read through a text, the more acquainted and accustomed we become to the environment and setting.

With each reading, a new theme or a new pattern should emerge. Details that at first seemed insignificant start to change in priority. Parts that were murky in understanding soon clarify. Repetition deepens impression. In the previous section, the goodness of God was seen through tracing through the history of the Israelites. Another obvious pattern of repetition is the use of contrast adverbs. Words like yet, nevertheless, however, and but connect the first thought to the second thought, but in the form of a contra-point to the previous point. In many ways, it reads like a song with interposing parts.

Verse 15: "You gave them bread from heaven . . . and brought them water."

Verse 16: "But they and our fathers acted proudly."

Verse 18: "They made a molded calf for themselves."

Verse 19: "Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness."

Verse 25: "So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness."

Verse 26: "Nevertheless they were disobedient" (emphasis added; NKJV).

This continues throughout the prayer. The conclusion of the prayer is found in verse 33, "For You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly" (NKJV). It's one thing to say that God is good and that we are bad. But it's another thing to remember every single instance of God's goodness and humanity's failure. Whereas the goodness of God gives assurance for the future, it's the failure and disobedience of the Israelites that is disconcerting. Why did they fall? Because they forgot the goodness of God.

Forgetfulness can have dire consequences. This isn't about a single instance but about a continuous habit of not taking the Lord seriously and taking His goodness for granted. Forgetfulness has parallels to presumption, cheap grace, and a false sense of faithfulness. The exercise of this prayer of remembrance brought this spiritual reality to the forefront.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Exod. 2:23-25

Luke 17:32

Heb. 13:1-8



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with

Review your memorized verse from Nehemiah 9.



Meditate on Nehemiah 9 again and look for Jesus in the chapter.



How far back can you recount Christ working in your family history?

Take time now to reflect on the trajectory of God's hand in your personal life as well as in your spiritual community. What patterns emerge? What is the theology of salvation history in your life? How does this narrative fit into the larger narrative of the Adventist movement, the Christian church, and the great controversy?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus work in your life?



Review your memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

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As you have studied this
week, what personal
applications have you been
convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications
you must make in your school,
family, workplace, and church?



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MORE PRAISE IN PRAYER

“ ‘Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.’ Have any of us duly considered how much we have to be thankful for? Do we remember that the mercies of the Lord are new every morning and that His faithfulness faileth not? Do we acknowledge our dependence upon Him and express gratitude for all His favors? On the contrary, we too often forget that ‘every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.’

“How often those who are in health forget the wonderful mercies that are continued to them day by day, year after year. They render no tribute of praise to God for all His benefits. But when sickness comes, God is remembered. The strong desire for recovery leads to earnest prayer, and this is right. God is our refuge in sickness as in health. But many do not leave their cases with Him; they encourage weakness and disease by worrying about themselves. If they would cease repining and rise above depression and gloom, their recovery would be more sure. They should remember with gratitude how long they enjoyed the blessing of health; and should this precious boon be restored to them, they should not forget that they are under renewed obligations to their Creator. When the ten lepers were healed, only one returned to find Jesus and give Him glory. Let us not be like the unthinking nine, whose hearts were untouched by the mercy of God.

“The habit of brooding over anticipated evils is unwise and unchristian. In thus doing we fail to enjoy the blessings and to improve the opportunities of the present. The Lord requires us to perform the duties of today and to endure its trials. We are today to watch that we offend not in word or deed. We must today praise and honor God. By the exercise of living faith today we are to conquer the enemy. We must today seek God and be determined that we will not rest satisfied without His presence. We should watch and work and pray as though this were the last day that would be granted us. How intensely earnest, then, would be our life. How closely would we follow Jesus in all our words and deeds!”¹

1. Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1991), 293–294.



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Why is it important for leaders to reflect on the past?

How does a social media/tech-savvy culture erode the ability to reflect?

How can technology help us to reflect?

What powerful insights have emerged from studying how God has led in your life?

As much as forgetfulness has spiritual repercussions, in what ways can forgetting be beneficial?

What lessons can we learn from reflecting spiritually, personally, collectively, nationally, and as a church?

How can we stop forgetting God's goodness?

How does remembering God's character help us in future trials?